

External Relations Notes
Texas Rising Star Stakeholder Meetings

February 13, 2020 – McAllen

TWC Child Care and Early Learning staff hosted a regional stakeholder meeting in McAllen on Thursday, February 13, 2020. Lindsay Hill opened the meeting with an overview of the Texas Rising Star (TRS) 4-year review process and proposed revisions to the TRS guidelines that were recommended by the TRS workgroup. She invited the participants to offer comments and ask questions.

Dr. Beverly Ashley asked Ms. Hill to elaborate on a proposed change to the Director and Staff Qualifications category that would remove the director's course. Ms. Hill said there was discussion about this course which had been required under TRS guidelines but was never created. Allowances were being made for some classes to count, but a study confirmed that this requirement was too often marked not applicable. The proposal was to integrate tailored director training as part of the Continuous Quality Improvement Plan (CQIP).

Dr. Ashley asked about the rationale of a 1-star level and why there would be no mentoring or assessing for 1-star providers. Ms. Hill said there was discussion about whether subsidy providers should be part of TRS. She said the workgroup talked about requiring subsidy providers to be 2-star and what that would look like. The thought was that a steppingstone to TRS is needed and that this might be the best and easiest way to get there. She said there are subsidy providers with numerous violations caring for children. This proposal would help ensure providers are at least meeting screening requirements which indicate they are compliant with Health and Human Services Commission Child Care Licensing (CCL) requirements, but it would not indicate the quality of an assessed TRS level.

Reagan Miller said the workgroup was interested in TWC considering a long-term plan that would require anyone taking a subsidy to be quality. The workgroup discussed whether providers should be moved to a 2-star right away if a steppingstone could be considered. The workgroup did not favor making all subsidy providers 1-star because not all providers have quality, and it could water down the brand and stain those that are providing quality child care. She said the 1-star would indicate that the provider is operating above licensing without a significant number of violations. The workgroup also wanted consideration of a long-range plan that could require providers to move up the TRS ladder. Can providers stay 1-star, or would there be any expectation that they will move up? The thought was that a 2-3 year goal could be set for all provider to meet the 1-star requirements in order to receive subsidized kids, and then they would have 1 or 2 years to move up a level.

A provider asked about the impact on a new center. Ms. Miller noted that a new center would have no history, so it could be based on the initial CCL visit. The provider said the center would have deficiencies on an initial visit and cannot get a license until they are cleared.

Pattie Rosenlund with Easter Seals – Rio Grande Valley suggested a quality measure under Program Administration around serving kids with disabilities. She said research shows that serving kids with disabilities in an inclusive setting benefits all kids. She said it is also important to leverage community resources such as Early Childhood Intervention. She suggested including something under Program Administration that considers whether a center has a way of providing referrals if a child is identified as

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having a potential delay. Ms. Hill said that measures for accommodating families and children have been condensed into a required measure under Programs and Policies. Providers have to have a plan on how they will assist children and families. Pattie advocated for a stronger measure. Ms. Wilson said that addressing inclusivity will be an important focus of the new CQIP.

Ms. Rosenlund recommended a campaign to educate families on quality child care and said this would drive providers to pursue higher star levels. Ms. Hill noted that a TWC outreach plan to educate parents on the importance of quality child care is included in the proposals.

A participant asked for clarification regarding the proposed assessor certification course. Ms. Hill said that the assessor certification and training course was created through a study to ensure that assessors are valid and reliable. This would ensure that a 4-star provider in McAllen is assessed the same as one in Dallas. She said a course has been created with training components for mentors and training and certification for assessors. Assessors will complete the certification and quarterly reliability checks. Ms. Hill said a centralized TRS assessment function has been proposed to improve reliability. The training is expected to be implemented in October when the final rule would become effective.

Ms. Miller said that the workgroup discussed category weightings and recommended giving greater weight to Teacher-Child Interaction based on CLI's study that showed interactions to be most closely tied to child outcomes. TWC has asked CLI pull information from CLI Engage and do a crosswalk to show how child care programs would score under the new system so that programs can understand how the changes will impact them.

Dr. Ashley said that the 40% weighting for Teacher-Child Interactions is a lot for one category. She said that if interaction is not happening, other things may not be happening, but said that provider may not be able to come into TRS at all if they are not doing well in this category. Ms. Miller said TWC has been learning how other states set up their Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS). Louisiana has the caregiver category at 100%. She said this will allow consideration for staff that are good with kids but lack a CDA which has been mentioned as a concern by some commenters. Ms. Miller said that CLI studied correlations and found strong evidence to support importance of this category. Dr. Ashley expressed appreciation that TWC has data and research to back up proposed changes.

Ms. Miller said that proposed changes also streamline duplicative measures and enhance TRS requirements in response to legislative changes to licensing requirements because TRS is expected to go above and beyond licensing.

Allison Wilson mentioned that the workgroup included five representatives from child care programs, more than were included in the past, to help provide context for the data.

Dr. Ashley expressed support for changing the terminology to promote professionalization of the early childhood field.

A mentor/assessor asked if changes to the deficiencies have been considered. Ms. Hill said two deficiencies would be moved from critical to high/medium high, and one measure would be removed

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altogether. No additional deficiencies were added. Ms. Miller explained that the workgroup members believed the affected deficiencies are things that can be corrected quickly and that they should not have immediate impact.

A provider asked when the changes will be effective for new providers coming into TRS. Ms. Hill said the changes will be effective January 2021. Ms. Wilson explained that the focus from October through December will be on training TRS staff, completing assessor certifications, and making sure programs have the information to prepare them to be assessed against the new standards.

A provider asked how the TRS assessment process will change. Ms. Hill explained that, under the proposed revision, the assessor will give a 2-week window for when the assessment will be conducted. The provider can ask the assessor not to come on specific days within the window, but they would not know exactly when the assessor is coming.

A participant asked if Category 2: Teacher-Child Interactions and Category 4: Indoor/Outdoor Environments would still apply to nationally accredited programs. Ms. Hill said that they would.

A participant asked who would complete the screening form if the 1-star recommendation is adopted. Ms. Hill said that TWC is looking to automate the screening form. At their discretion, Boards will be able to access real-time information on programs that qualify for 1-star. The system would generate this information automatically so that assessors and mentors do not have to compare information on the CCL page.

A participant asked if 1-stars would receive an incentive. Ms. Hill said they would not receive enhanced rates since they are not providing an additional level of quality. A provider suggested requiring a visit for 1-stars to evaluate what level they are at. Ms. Wilson said that, initially, this would be an outreach recruitment tool to identify programs that are ready to move forward in TRS. Ms. Hill said TWC would ask the Boards to notify the program if they pass the screening tool. A provider who is not currently TRS said that, if she becomes a 1-star provider, she would like the Board to help her program become 2-star. Ms. Hill said part of the messaging would inform 1-star providers about other TRS levels and how the Board can help. A mentor/assessor said that the 1-star implies that a provider is higher quality rather than just meeting minimum thresholds.

The provider who is not currently TRS said that she knows she would get a bump in the reimbursement rate at a 2-star level which could possibly offset costs for her private pay families. Ms. Miller explained a TWC partner in Dallas has developed a spreadsheet that will be populated with Board rates. Providers can use this to input the number of kids in care by age range and what they charge for private pay families. This would show what the provider can make at different star levels.

A provider said noted that TRS is a voluntary program and said that some programs would be a 4-star if they participated, but they do not want to deal with visits and requirements. She said providers should have to be TRS to get the subsidy.

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A Board staff member asked about quality providers that do not have a provider agreement to care for subsidized kids. Ms. Miller suggested that educating parents could generate interest in going to TRS providers and drive market forces that would encourage providers to join and that the quality framework, mentors, and other resources could also draw providers into TRS.

A provider said many parents choose child care providers based on location, hours, and convenience without regard to provider quality. Parents will pay more or choose a lower quality facility if it has longer hours that better match the parents' work schedule.

Board staff asked about a recommendation to allow Early Head Start and Head Start programs to participate in TRS so that they may be considered nationally accredited programs. Ms. Hill said the programs would still have to have a contract, be licensed, and pass the screening form. She said these programs typically provide wraparound care. Mentors could provide mentoring in these centers.

Frank Almaraz, Chief Executive Officer of Workforce Solutions – Lower Rio Grande, asked about the workgroup recommendation to limit the impact of licensing deficiencies on TRS programs. Ms. Hill explained the proposed changes. She said, instead of licensing deficiencies having an immediate impact on a program's star level, the program would be placed on probation and receive technical assistance and mentoring. She suggested partnering with CCL and documenting a plan for getting into compliance in the CQIP. If there are no other deficiencies in six months, the program would be able to go off probation. If there was another deficiency during probation, the program would be placed on a second probation. A provider cannot have more than two consecutive probations or more than four probations over three years.

A provider said that if CCL and TRS are working together, Licensing will expect to find TRS quality when they visit a provider. She suggested that, if CCL finds a deficiency, the program could receive technical assistance instead of being cited for a deficiency. Ms. Hill said the workgroup discussed cross training with CCL and Assessor/Mentors. Assessor/Mentors will receive training. She said that regional CCL staff has been reaching out to Boards to coordinate efforts. Ms. Hill said that it is a good recommendation to see if there can be some understanding and for assessor/mentors to help providers be more successful with licensing. Ms. Wilson clarified that, while TWC is partnering with CCL, they are the regulatory body for child care per statute. TWC does not have control over what deficiencies CCL cites but does have control over the impact of deficiencies on TRS status. She noted that the workgroup included a representative from CCL.

Attendees were invited to email written comments to trs4yearreview@twc.state.tx.us.